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AUTHOR Khan, Seemin Anwar
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ABSTRACT

Conducted in the Punjab in Jhok Sayal, a predominantly Muslim village, this narrative study described: the environment and living conditions of women in this rural village (comprised mainly of tenants and landless labourers); the attitudes of the women toward education, marriage, family planning, and skills; and the woman's daily and annual activities. Sixty-three married women from 63 separate households were interviewed. Of these 63, none were household heads. Findings included: 87% lived in "Katcha" houses made of mud, dung, and straw; the neater, better maintained structures ("Pucca" houses) belonged to the tenants; most lived in close proximity to livestock, and without separate latrine and cooking facilities; a full day was spent engaged in hard, physical labour, interspersed with child-care, housework, food preparation, and home-related skills; their physical chores were intensified during the planting, harvest, and processing seasons; they attached greater importance to the education of males; 62% wished their daughters to be married between the age of 12 and 17; preference for sons, economic security in old age, "it is God's will", and fear of birth control were given for nonacceptance of family planning; and most women disapproved of selling their skills (i.e., pickle making, straw work, clay pottery, spinning, sewing) for cash. (NQ)

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THE ENVIRONMENT, ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITIES OF RURAL WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF JHOK SAYAL

(Seemin Anwar Khan)

I

INTRODUCTION

Changing social and economic conditions in Pakistan and throughout the world require an appraisal of the role women play in their environment. Strategies are being proposed to promote integration of women into the development process. In Pakistan there is a particular concern for rural areas where the majority of the population lives. To make such strategies effective, however, we need to have more baseline data about the target group, i.e. the rural women.

Our objective in this study is to report, as accurately and comprehensively as we can, what village women do "economically". It is common knowledge that women participate at different times of the year in the harvesting and planting of crops, but very little is known about how much time is spent in these tasks and how these activities affect the lives of village women. Beyond work in the fields rural women are active in producing goods and services, mostly for their families own consumption but some for sale and exchange in the local market, such as handicrafts and foodstuff. No one has yet calculated the NFP..... the net female product ..... of a country, but it is likely to be quite large and in Pakistan the bulk of the NFP is generated in the rural sector.

In this paper we will highlight different dimensions of economic activities of rural women and describe the attitudinal and environmental factors which influence village women's participation in the rural economy. We have based our observations on a village study[1], a detailed version of which is available at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. As will be seen the approach is narrative rather analytical, but on subjects such as rural women where there is relatively little existing research and almost no theoretical models, careful description is a necessary prerequisite to sound analysis.

The intent of our study was to do three things:-

(1) Describe the environment and living conditions of rural women in a Pakistani village, characterized by a population comprised mainly of tenants and landless labourers.

(2) Describe the attitudes of these women towards education, marriage, family planning and skills and identify some of the reasons why these attitudes exist.

(3) Describe in detail the daily and annual activities of rural women.

The intent was to stimulate interest in research on rural women rather than to test hypotheses or to recommend policy measures. Therefore, this study should be regarded as a first step towards better understanding of rural women in Pakistan.

II

BACKGROUND

The study was conducted in the Punjab in Jhok Sayal, a predominantly Muslim village. Jhok Sayal is a 15 miles walk from the Lahore-Lyallpur highway. The nearest town is eight miles away and furnishes railway service to the villagers. The principal and cheapest means of transportation is provided by three road transport companies that connect Jhok Sayal with the neighbouring settlements.

Jhok Sayal is comprised of 690 acres of land of which 633 acres are being cultivated. Tubewells were installed in the area in mid-sixties under the Salanity Control And Rehabilitation Programme (SCARP). Electricity is supplied only to the mosque and the homes of three landlords. The primary school for boys is presently attended by over 100 students, 6 of whom are girls.

The total number of households in Jhok Sayal is 102 to 110. Total population is around 700. Sixty-three married women from 63 separate households were interviewed.

The families of three large landowners in the village control 70 percent of the cultivated land. Two of them employ permanent labourers on a monthly salary to work their lands, the third hires permanent labourers to work portions of his land and leases the remainder to the tenant farmers. Casual labourers are also used whenever the need arises.

Of the total sixty-three households in the sample, 27 households are in the farming, 15 are employed as permanent or casual labourers and 21 work in service-related jobs. There are no female heads of households. The widows and divorcees live with their parents or brothers.

The main crops grown in Jhok Sayal are wheat, sugar cane, cotton, rice, chillies and onions. Livestock and poultry are also important to the villagers as food and a source of income.

There are two types of houses in the village - Katcha and Pucca. Eighty-seven percent of the sample households live in Katcha houses made of mud, dung and straw: Pucca houses, which are neater, better maintained structures belong to the tenants. Most of the houses are grouped together in clusters around small compounds. The sanitary conditions of all households are poor. Most people live in close proximity to livestock, and without separate latrine and cooking facilities. None of the structures are electrified.

There is no health center in Jhok Sayal. Landlords dispense free supplies of medicines such as aspirin and quinine. Serious cases are referred to the hospitals in one of the nearby towns. The villagers, however, are highly superstitious and become disillusioned when modern medicine does not provide a quick cure. Many of them still have more faith in Pirs (Saints) or Amils (Exorcists).

2. DAILY ACTIVITIES OF JHOK SAYAL WOMEN

This section sketches the activities of a typical village woman on a normal day. The typical woman here is the 25-35 years old wife of a tenant. The day is normal in the sense that it is outside the hectic harvesting season. While the exact amount of time spent in activities is not the same for each household, the tasks performed by women are similar in nature and intensity /see table 1/.

Women rise before dawn (about 4.30 a.m in Summers) use the fields and wash in preparation for the new day, and say morning prayers. The first chores include tending to the animals and preparing milk products. Preparation of a light breakfast, tending to children, and light house-work follows. About 8.30 a.m. most women carry the breakfast/lunch to their husbands in the fields. Some women stay in the fields awhile to cut grass and weeds for fodder, others water and tend the animals, and still others collect dung to make dung cakes for fuel.

Collecting fodder is a big job, and generally takes 3-4 hours per day. Many women spent time in the morning and afternoon performing this task. High priority is assigned to animal care because of the central role of animals in the household economy, both in terms of subsistence and income. Some women claim they take better care of their animals than their children.

Water collection in the morning and afternoon is another major task for women who are often aided by their young children. The duration of this task varies on the demand for water by the individual households but it occupies a minimum of one hour per day of women's time and is hard physical labour. Clothes washing is also done at the tubewell, and while not a daily chore, is part of women's work.

Some women are occupied in the afternoon with pulses or wheat grinding ---- either by hand on stone grinders or at the oxen-powered karrass*. Other are free from physical chores at this time and turn their attention to their skill-related activities.

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* A stone-grinder run by oxen-power.

Preparations for the evening meal start round 4.00 pm. and go on for at least one hour. Dinner is the only proper meal for many families, and the leftovers are used the following day at breakfast and lunch. Cleaning up after dinner is done immediately by some women and postponed until the following morning by others.

TABLE I

Workload of a Woman on a Normal Day

Activity	Hours-Min.	Percentage
1. Animal care	1.45	11.67
2. Collecting, carrying and preparing fodder.	3.45	25.00
3. House cleaning & dung-cakes	0.45	5.00
4. Cooking	1.45	8.33
5. Carrying food to fields, feeding children	1.30	10.00
6. Carrying water	0.30	3.33
7. Milking and churning	1.00	20.00
8. Child care	0.30	3.33
9. Other domestic chores	3.00	20.00
10. Afternoon rest	1.00	6.67
	15.00	100.00

Most women retire after evening prayers. They have spent a full day engaged in hard, physical labour, interspersed with child-care, housework, food preparation, and home related skills. At least half of their energy is involved in work outside the home.

3. ANNUAL ACTIVITIES

The physical chores of women are intensified during the planting, harvest and processing seasons. The intensity of the physical labour varies with the season and the amount of activity outside the home fluctuates. During the wheat harvest for example, women spend about 10 hours in the fields and also attend to their daily domestic chores. They also take part in husking, winnowing and storing of wheat, rice and maize. They help their husbands in preparation for rice nursery, transplanting and rice sowing. They also guard (rakhi) the wheat and corn fields from birds and animals. Picking chillies and cotton is also one of their major annual activities. Women living in katcha houses have to renovate them twice a year after the end of rainy seasons. Before the wheat harvest women make large mud drums (Parola) for storing grain. They also make mangers (Khurlee) for animals and cages for the fowl in this season. In autumn when there is no grass in the fields for fodder the women (of the landless families) peel the tops (aag) from the sugar cane to use for fodder. The tops (aag) are the wages of loading the bundles of sugarcane on the trucks, bound for the sugarmill.

III

ATTITUDES OF WOMEN IN SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

This section examines the attitudes of the 63 married women interviewed towards education, age at marriage, family planning, and skills:-

(1) Education

The literacy rate for 63 married women in the sample is 7 percent. In absolute terms only 4 out of 63 women knew how to read and write. However, nearly half of these women expressed aspirations for their daughters to finish primary school (i.e. to learn to read and write). Only the 4 literate women wish their daughters to be educated beyond primary school. Poverty, social traditions, lack of girls school in the village, the expectation that girls would not earn their livelihood and the participation of young girls in household activities are some deterrents to girls education. The idea of equal educational facilities for males and females was rejected by women interviewed with greater importance attached to the education of males.

(2) Age at Marriage

The majority of girls in the village are married off a month or two after the first menstruation. Sixty-two percent of women wish their daughters to be married between the age of 12-17. Marriages are arranged and the tradition of watta, or pledging sons and daughters between two families, often at the time of birth of the child, reinforces the role played by elders in determining the future of children.

(3) Family Planning

Awareness of family planning is high (79%) among the women interviewed. However only 30% of them indicated that they would practice it and there was no way of determining how many actually did practice it. The subject of family planning is not treated seriously by the women interviewed and drew little response except embarrased laughter. Preference for sons, economic security in old age, "It is God's will" and fear of birth control methods are some of the reasons for non-acceptance of family planning.

(4) Skills

A variety of skills are practiced by the village women. These include pickle making, straw work, clay pottery, spinning, embriodery, knitting, crocheting and sewing. Most of the products of these skills are consumed by the household. Most women disapprove of selling their skills for cash. However there are some goods that are socially recognised as being marketable.

IV

SUMMARY

The approach of this study has been narrative and descriptive rather than analytical. We have not produced general policy recommendations nor have any major new hypotheses concerning the role of rural women in Pakistan emerged from our study. Pakistan is still at the rudimentary stage in research on women and neither existing data nor the analytical models can support policy recommendations at this time. To bring research in women to a policy relevant stage, it is necessary to start with basic data collection so that existing hypotheses can be tested against case study and sample survey data.

In their well known article, "A model of an agrarian economy with non-agricultural activities"[2], Hymer and Resnick distinguish between agricultural activities and a set of non-agricultural activities which produce, what they call, Z goods. Z goods are essentially home products such as processing of food and fuel, spinning, weaving, manufacturing and repair of tools and implements, pottery and metal working as well as housebuilding, fence repairing and services such as recreation, protection, transport, distribution etc. Their principal hypothesis is, "A major substitution that occurs in the process of development is not the replacement of leisure and idleness by work, but rather the shift from inferior methods of home production to superior methods based on specialization and exchange." Therefore they argue, "A rise in the price

of food or an improvement in technology would provide a rural surplus of food or labour to the extent that manufactured goods were highly desired by the rural areas as substitutes for subsistence consumption of goods or food."

Our study can throw some light on Hymer-Resnick hypothesis and hopefully produce some useful refinements appropriate to existing conditions in Pakistan. For example, in spite of increased yields and increased prices of agricultural goods during the 1965-75 decade, there has been no noticable change in rural women's work. What Hymer-Resnick have suggested is that as income and prices rise the workload of women, through a decrease in their participation in Z activities, would decline. Therefore their hypothesis is essentially an inversely proportional relation between income and women's work. From what we have observed in our field study in Jhok Sayal, there is no recollection of a decline in women's work. So one hypothesis for further study about rural women in Pakistan is whether their workload is inversely proportional to income or whether it is charaterized by a "threshold effect" i.e. workload remains constant as income increases but at a certain income level (i.e. threshold) there is a noticeable decline in workload. It would be interesting to find out at what income level this "threshold effect" becomes operative. For countries like Pakistan this threshold might be very high, may be twice of what the level of real income is now.

Hymer and Resnick have not taken into account different groups of the rural population. In the production of Z goods a distinction has to be made between what is produced by women of the landless and the landed families. For the women in tenant or small farming families increased agricultural output could generate surplus food. This in turn could be exchanged for manufactured goods thereby reducing the production of Z goods and lessening their workload. At the same time increased output could mean more

work in the fields. Unless some of the increased output (i.e. additional income) is used for hired labour* improvement in technology might mean an increase rather than a decrease in the workload of women in small farming and tenants families.

The landless may not get enough benefits of technology. Increased yields of wheat, rice and sugarcane might mean more to be harvested and more wages in cash and kind but also more intensive work for females in all aspects of agricultural production. Moreover, rising food prices are not accompanied by relative rise in wages. Therefore Z activities might become important for landless women as a means of generating income. Our study vividly underlines the need to distinguish between Z activities of the landed and the landless.

We can also consider the well known set of hypotheses on modernity suggested by Inkeles and Smith in their recently published book, Becoming Modern[3]. They discuss "underdevelopment" and negative attitudes as being a state of mind, but a state that is capable of change.

In our study we observed that women, in general, have a low self-image. Women have been and still continue to be an underprevilaged, oppressed group. Consequently, not only have they developed negative attitudes towards many positive aspects of life but have also built up an inferior self-image.

Inkeles and Smith tested many variables of modernity including the influence of co-operatives. They found that villagers associated with the famous Comilla Cooperative project in East Pakistan were more modern in outlook and more amenable to change in their environment.

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* In our study we observed that female (family) labour is used by tenants and small farmers to save on hired labour.

Pakistan is still some way off from introducing a Comilla type of cooperative experiment on a large scale basis. It would, however, be an interesting hypothesis to test whether less rigorous forms of cooperatives for women in rural areas can help to enhance women's personal estimation of their own value.

Hypotheses like those mentioned above and numerous others are comming out from sociological and economic theories and studies. Village studies have to fill in many gaps in helping test and refine these hypotheses by providing baseline data of the actual activities and productive work of women. Comparative village studies in different parts of Pakistan could generate a framework for defining behavior, attitudes, distribution, production and participation. They will provide a deeper understanding of the problems of rural women and will not only help in formulating general policy recommendations but also enable social planners to effectively implement the programmes aimed at improving the conditions of life for rural women and integrating them more fully into the process of national development.

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